

DISCLAIMER:

**Portions of this text may not be
100% accurate.**

Every effort was made during the speech to accurately capture any of the Mayor's unwritten comments.

THANK YOU STEVE, AND THANK YOU TO THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND YOUR SPONSORS FOR MAKING THIS DAY POSSIBLE. LET ME ALSO THANK MY FAMILY AND STAFF.

Before I begin, I have to address one thing. I had breakfast with a friend and he mentioned a comment that was in the paper that made me sound arrogant. I mentioned to him that I am not arrogant. Arrogant people play characters like James Bond and Luke Skywalker. They don't play characters named Bubba Skinner.

Let me tell you a story. During the 2nd year of "Heat of the Night," I was asked to present the Entertainer of the Year award to Garth Brooks at the Country Music Awards. I flew out to Hollywood and presented the award as requested. Because I had a shoot back on set, I had to fly out right after the awards, but I did have a few minutes to spend with Garth Brooks after I gave him his award.

When I arrived back in Georgia to begin taping again, there was a large crowd of about 600 people gathered. My assistant was with me and did a good job of getting me through the crowd so that I could get to work. But as we were walking onto the set, I heard a little voice crying out, "Bubba! Bubba!" I decided I would go over and say hello to the little boy whose voice I heard. I walked up to him and he asked to shake my hand. Well, I shook his hand and he immediately ran away. I was a bit perplexed by his actions, but figured out what was going on when I heard him crying out, "Mama! Mama! I just shook the hand that shook Garth Brooks' hand! I never have to worry about being arrogant.

Political capital. You're not in the public service world very long before you hear the phrase "political capital." I first heard it from a political consultant, Carlos, when I first announced my decision to run for Mayor in 1999. He painstakingly explained to me that my lack of political experience could be offset by my success as a former quarterback for the Green Bay Packers and as co-star on "In the Heat of the Night."

I asked him if he had ever seen me play football in the NFL or act on “Heat of the Night.” He confessed to have never witnessed either. So I proceeded to inform him that I had a great career going in the NFL – until they put me in. I also questioned how much my performance on “Heat of the Night” would be beneficial in a mayoral race when my total dialogue on most shows consisted of saying “Get right on it, Chief.” Well, he seemed undeterred and insisted that I had attained a certain level of political capital and if I just used it wisely and made a few adjustments, I had a shot.

He was absolutely insistent, however, that everything was doomed if I was committed to making education, jobs, public safety and revitalization of downtown the cornerstones of my campaign. To quote him, “The two in the middle are a safe bet; everybody wants jobs and safer streets. But as for education and growth, the unions and the developers will hand you your political head if you disrupt either one of them.” Well, I responded by sharing with him my deep conviction that I held a different view of Fresno. That everything that makes a city strong and competitive – including good jobs, safe streets and healthy growth – are all dependent on a strong and successful public school system.

He agreed, somewhat, but insisted that my strategy was wrong and referred to a recent local poll to prove his point. This particular poll didn’t even list education as a major concern for Fresnoans. When I asked what was on the list, he responded with a wry smile, “Water meters.”

“Water meters,” I replied.

“Yep, water meters. That’s your issue. Mr. Autry, I know it might sound a little odd to you, but you see, Districts 2 and 6 always pick the Mayor because they have the biggest turnouts by far and water meters are very important to these folks.”

“Well,” I said, “are they for them or against them?”

“I don’t know,” he said, “but, hey, we’ll just take another poll and find out.”

He must have read my silence as tacit approval because he quickly followed up by admonishing me that, although my cornerstones had already

been made public, that if we moved quickly enough, we could replace education and downtown revitalization with water meters as the central issue and for a mere \$10,000 a month, he would show me just how to do it.

Well, I very politely told him that I wasn't much of a poll guy, so I'd just as soon stick with what I had. He paused for a moment and shook his head slowly. "You know, Alan," he said, "I've been in this business a long, long time and I've seen a lot of candidates come and go. They all get in a race thinking that they can change the world, but they never get elected because they don't know how the game is played." Then he looked me right in the eye and said something I'll never forget. He said, "You might be right about those issues, but you're going to lose because I know the people of Fresno and half the people in Fresno don't get it and the other half don't care."

Like I said earlier, in all due respect to his extensive political acumen, I held a different view of our community. "On election day, we'll find out, won't we?" he said.

"I suppose we will," I replied. With that, we parted our ways.

Well, in November of 2000, we did find out. We found out that Fresno does get it and Fresno does care. We made a collective vow that day to come together, work together and stay together; to face our problems head-on and defeat them. We made a promise to ourselves and to future generations to tear down the socio-economic walls that had divided our City for thirty years and become One Fresno.

Yes, there is much work to be done, but over the past four and a half years, we have kept those promises to each other. As a result, our City, in the most difficult of times, has moved further faster than anytime in history. Our City has emerged as an example of now only how to survive in difficult times, but how to continue moving forward during those times as well. Together, we're closing the book on a "Tale of Two Cities," chapter by chapter. We are now writing a new Fresno Story - a story of determination, confidence and optimism.

How have we done it? By becoming a team. More importantly, by becoming a winning team. Now, I look around and know that there are those in

this room that scoff at such a notion. That's okay. That's your choice to make. But to those Fresno-bashers, both amateur and professional, who have wielded their culture of despair so successfully for folly and profit in the past, I have this to say to you today – on behalf of myself, my family and the thousands of Fresnans who love this community: your days are done. No, we are not perfect, nor will we ever claim to be. But our community is honored to be who we are, where we came from and where we're going. We are proud to call Fresno our home and Fresno State our University. We are building this community to last and we will succeed. No amount of your negativity will keep us from winning or tear this team apart.

You know, I've been on a lot of teams in my day, some winning teams and some losing teams. And those experiences have left me with one inescapable conclusion – winning is better. Flat out.

So, what does it take to become a winning team? I believe it starts with basic, good old-fashioned hard work.

And nowhere is hard work more evident than in the tireless efforts of Pete Weber, Ken Newby, Ashley Swearingen and all of the 300 plus volunteers of the Regional Jobs Initiative. By devoting enormous amounts of time and energy to the mission of breaking the back of double-digit unemployment, the RJI has played an instrumental role in seeing unemployment in Fresno County at a 15-year low. The RJI is the best hope we have ever had to lower and stabilize our unemployment. I also wanted to thank all of the people and hard work that went into getting the Empowerment Zone and Hope VI. I also want to thank the forgotten team, the All-America City team. I recognize the effort that you have made. I see some of you sitting out there. Keith Kelly and others, would you please stand and be recognized? Our community is indebted to you for all your hard work.

In a city where we say "hard work," we automatically think police officers and firefighters, and rightfully we should.

Thanks to the strong leadership of Chief Dyer and some of the finest police officers in this country, teamed with a stellar contingent of community

volunteers, last year saw a 33-year low in crime within the City of Fresno. This year will see the addition of 17 officers to bring our total number of sworn officers to 827. That is the most officers in the history of this City.

Under the exceptional leadership and hard work of Fire Chief Randy Bruegman, our fire department is entering a new and exciting era. We have always had some of the finest firefighters in the country, but years of under-funding had left the ranks short on personnel and resources. Four and a half years ago, we began rebuilding the department. Today, we have added 33 new firefighters and invested \$9.8 million additional dollars in the fire department. I am determined that Chief Bruegman's goal of "4 minutes to excellence" be achieved. Chief, great job.

The public safety of the citizenry is the most solemn duty of any mayor. In the post-9/11 world, it is my vow that I will do my best to walk through or knock down any door in Washington to get the needed federal dollars and designations to keep that vow, regardless of the political capital it may cost me.

We are seeing increased cooperation, communication, and the sharing of resources among law enforcement agencies as we collectively battle the methamphetamine epidemic, gang violence, and terrorism through the creation of task forces, sharing of resources, and the development of a joint public safety dispatch center. Yet we must do more. In an effort to eliminate the duplication of services by law enforcement agencies and to ensure the efficient use of tax payer dollars, I am calling for the immediate creation of a Blue Ribbon committee to research the feasibility of consolidating Fresno City and Fresno County law enforcement services.

Continuing along the same avenue as working together, a winning team needs to communicate. Thanks to the New Normal (*Roger Montero*) at City Hall, a culture of individuals is being torn down and replaced with a team dedicated to "a culture of excellence where the people – you – get the best every day." This new team philosophy is going to create a strong, lasting foundation to deliver city services at the highest level possible to the people of Fresno. I want to personally thank all the hard-working city employees who have embraced this

New Normal. We have, without a doubt, some of the hardest-working city employees in this entire country.

Years back, when crime was out of control in our City, a group of pastors led by G.L. Johnson of People's Church got together and created the "No-Name Fellowship." Dedicated to working together to communicate, to take our City back, they were successful and, in the process, set an example of how to communicate and collaborate to solve the problems in our community. *(Thank you to G.L., who had to go to a funeral. I want to thank him for leading this effort)*

Today, government, business, non-profits, community groups and educational institutions are working together and communicating like never before. The Cities of Fresno, Clovis and the County of Fresno are finally understanding that the petty differences and provincial attitudes that have divided us for so long must be replaced with mutual respect and collaboration. You know, communication in these historically challenging times is not an option, it is a fundamental necessity.

A winning team must also have discipline. Nowhere is this more essential than in the implementation of our General Plan. Remember the game "Hide and Seek?" I do that from issue to issue. You say, "Ready or not, here I come!" Well, in the next 20 years – in planning terms about as long as it takes to count to ten – an additional 330,000 people will be living inside our city limits. We can run, but we can't hide from such an influx of people.

Our 2025 General Plan is constructed to accommodate that growth in a prudent and healthy fashion. It halts the strain and drain of sprawl to the north and redirects growth in and up with higher densities. Annexation of some non-prime agricultural land in our southern sectors will return our downtown to the center of our city, the heart of our city, where it rightfully should be. This plan will allow mass transit to be a truly viable transportation option while allowing our overall quality of life to be preserved. We must, however, have the collective political and community discipline to stick with this plan. This plan is good. This plan is working.

I want to commend the Council for the discipline to support the Fancher Creek Project, an important component to the plan and I'm here today to urge LAFCO to approve the expansion of the City's sphere of influence in the southeast, which is included in the approved General Plan.

A winning team must have courage; the ability to stay on course when the storms hit; the ability to do what is right, even if it's unpopular at the time. I would like to recognize today a special act of courage. You know, during last year's State of the City speech, I spoke of the drug crisis facing our region, particularly in our schools. I stated that the first two places that a parent finds out their kids are on drugs are at jail or at the morgue. This is a sad, but irrefutable fact.

Student drug testing has been proven to be a deterrent to usage, an early detection to prevent addiction and an opportunity to open up a positive dialogue between parents and their children. Last year, I strongly urged all Fresno school districts to implement it. President Bush made funds available to cover the cost of it, yet so far no Fresno school district has stepped up.

However, two school districts did have the courage to take that step for the children; school districts that put common sense over nonsense and put the kids first over politics. Fowler Unified School District will be implementing voluntary and confidential student drug testing in their schools this fall. Kingsburg High School passed the same program this past Monday and will begin implementing their program this fall as well. With us today are Superintendent John Cruz and Board Member Peter Cholakian of Fowler Unified and Superintendent Linda Clark and Board President Bill Swanson of Kingsburg, would you please stand now? On behalf of Fresno, myself and all of the parents whose children have been lost to the horrors of drug abuse, and on behalf of all the young lives your brave decision will save – thank you and God bless you.

Learning to win as a team is one thing, to keep winning is another. To quote my good friend Pat Hill, "lets talk about a few must-wins."

In City government, nothing can ensure victory or defeat more than the decisions concerning your hard-earned tax dollars. You as a taxpayer have loaned me your trust to work together with the City Council to be good stewards

of those dollars. My administration has adopted a simple, effective and time-tested philosophy in order to fulfill that commitment to you. We give most of your tax dollars back to you in the form of services that are near and dear and important to you, we invest some to secure our future and we save some for a rainy day.

In a State where cities and counties are losing services through deficits and layoffs, this will be our fifth budget year with no layoffs, no reduction in services and the fourth budget in a row with a strong 5% reserve. Folks, we have a winning formula here and we're going to stick with it.

If a city doesn't have a downtown, it doesn't have a town. Talk to me about the focus of downtown. If you don't have downtown, you don't have a focus. The rebirth and revitalization of Downtown Fresno must continue. Our downtown stadium is a major success, bringing hundreds of thousands of people to Downtown every year. The privatization of the Convention Center complex has done exactly what we thought it would. The first quarter of this year, Pollstar ranked Selland Arena 21st in the world for ticket sales, ahead of venues such as Madison Square Garden and Sacramento's Arco Arena. And yes, my beloved Save Mart Center. Our renovation plans, once completed, will make it an even more successful venue in the future.

Housing in our southern section is the key to the overall health of our city. This half of our city that saw little or no housing in decades is now setting records for housing projects. In past 1 ½ years, there are approximately 6,800 approved lots south of Shaw Avenue – in various stages – and another 2,000 lots in the works.

In order to have a vibrant downtown, people must live downtown and more people are finding out every single day that downtown is a good, safe and profitable place to live. Special thanks today to Reza Assemi for believing in the heart of our City with his Vagabond Lofts project. You know, owning your own home is still one of the most precious of American dreams. We must make sure that, as we continue to move forward as a city, every hardworking Fresnan has a chance to attain that dream. That's why this year's budget contains \$4.3 million

for down payment assistance for low-income families, the largest amount in our city's history.

We must also be a city that believes in our youth, including those who are born into less than ideal circumstances. This year's budget contains funds to start a jobs program for at-risk youth. This is not only a youth investment, but an economic investment and a public safety investment. One of the best anti-gang and anti-drug programs you can find is holding a job.

In 2003, we were awarded a \$ 1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation. The grant was to be used to attract low-fare air service to our airport and it included a stipulation that the community – not the City and not the Airport – must provide a \$100,000 matching contribution. Well, today I am pleased to announce that, due to the hard work and dedication of the Fresno Chamber of Commerce, the Economic Development Corporation and our own City of Fresno Airport staff, Frontier Airlines operating as Frontier JetExpress will begin operations on August 31st (my son's birthday) with two weekday roundtrips and one Saturday and Sunday roundtrip from Fresno to Denver. Welcome to Fresno, Frontier.

The hardworking employees of our City Services Organization deserve a pension plan that meets their needs. They also require a pension plan they can count on for the future. Pension costs and health benefits are two of the many challenges and main challenges confronting the fiscal health of local and state governments across America.

In Fresno, management and labor are working to understand these complex issues in order to arrive at an outcome that will maintain the critical balance of our employee's needs, prudent financial management and our commitment of excellent service to the community. I am pleased and excited, to be quite honest with you, to announce that I have asked our Labor/Management Task Force to address this issue and I am confident that, together, with communication and hard work, we will create a system that is both strong and sustainable and protect both the future of the pension and the future of our city.

In order to truly be successful as a team, we must have trust. Fresno must realize that we are a vital part of a bigger team, the Valley Team. From Stockton to Bakersfield, all Valley cities are inextricably tied together. We share the same problems concerning air quality, water, jobs, education and political exclusion, so we must work hard and communicate together to find solutions to those problems.

Three years ago, Operation Clean Air, a valley-wide coalition of government, business, environmental groups and educational institutions was established. Its mission is to pursue policy and initiatives that both clean the air and create economic prosperity and not forsake one for the other. The organization is actively pursuing a “Federal Air Quality Empowerment Zone” status for the Valley that will dramatically enhance our ability to clean our air without sacrificing economic prosperity. The Air Quality Empowerment Zone has the support of the Valley’s entire Congressional and Senatorial delegation. OCA also initiated a change in our city’s fleet to clean air vehicles. The City of Fresno’s Fleet Management Division, led by John Hunt, has worked at changing over our fleet, becoming the largest clean fleet in the Valley. This accomplishment was acknowledged when I accepted the 2005 Clean Cities National Partner Award. That’s a great honor for our city. Folks, we are walking our talk.

June will mark the fourth annual Central California Mayor’s Conference. This organization was formed by Mayor Gary Podesto of Stockton, Mayor Harvey Hall of Bakersfield and myself. It has been extremely successful in bringing government leaders together to identify our common interests and challenges and, more importantly, creating action plans to address them. We are One Fresno but we must also be One Valley.

Team Fresno is also a member of a bigger team than the Valley – Team California. Now, critics and cynics will scoff at this notion as well, but there was a time when this state understood that we were one team. I remember that day. We were one team, one state. Back then, we didn’t have selected “golden regions,” we had a Golden State. We had a leadership that understood that the

fair and equitable distribution of resources throughout the entire state was essential to creating and maintaining a prosperous and competitive state. But for nearly thirty years now, we have seen a steady move away from this team concept of government. What was once one a state working as a team drawn together by public service, principle and fairness is now in a state of denial and a state of confusion dominated by self-serving, short-sighted politics of collusion and exclusion. What was once a dominant, cohesive team is now a tale of three states – Northern, Central and Southern California – with clear lines of socio-economic and political demarcation fed by partisan politics.

Over the years, these lines have grown into walls. As a result, Fresno and the entire Valley have suffered horribly. The politics of collusion and exclusion has resulted in a confluence of crises in education, transportation, water, and economic development that has turned a region that is bigger than twenty states in the Union, the Central Valley, into what many call “Appalachia West.”

That’s the bad news, but the good news is that we can fix it. We can do this if we work as a team, put politics aside and face these enormous problems head-on as a team. We have to understand that it took years of self-serving politics to dig this hole we’re in and it will take the purity of true public service to get us out, but we can do it. But you know something, as powerful as they may be, the forces of the politically poisoned status quo that seeks to keep us on the path of ruin, they are no match for a good team, a true team, dedicated to a noble and just cause.

I know our team can win. Why am I so certain? Because our team, Team California, has already gone head-to-head with the status quo and won. Proposition 1A is what it’s called. It is an historic piece of legislation that originated in the League of California Cities, an organization that was labeled by many politicians, in Sacramento mostly, as inept and ineffectual – perhaps with good reason. But under the specter of continued state raids on local treasuries that threatened the quality of life of every Californian – you and me – we became a team. Proposition 1A passed in November 2004 with 84% of the vote, sending a message to Sacramento that the people of California will no longer finance the

spending addiction of state government at the expense of our communities' health and public safety.

I've got to tell you a story to illustrate this. At the same time, Senate leaders had introduced SCA9 – that means “confuse the locals so that we can scam them again” – that was the legislators' answer to Prop 1A. It was promoted as a protection against future raids on local resources, but was in fact loaded with caveats that would have made it easier to rob local government blind and codified it into the State Constitution as well. It was worse than having no proposition at all. The legislators in support of SCA9 were poised like starving dogs in a meat house to take what little was left in our local coffers.

I worked for three weeks with the Governor, his staff and some key leaders of the legislature to hammer out a compromise. I watched with my own eyes as this Governor stood his ground beside local government, police, firefighters and their unions to protect what little tax dollars we had left after years of state thievery. Make no mistake, at that time, the Governor had a 68% approval rating. He was a powerful force that Prop 1A needed for victory. Without him, quite frankly, it would have failed.

The Governor had made delivery of a timely budget a top priority. The status quo knew that. The local funding issue was placed as the last big issue on the table and the clock was ticking. The legislative army behind SCA9 was so determined to raid local government coffers that they threatened to hold up the State budget indefinitely to do so. Under tremendous pressure, Governor Schwarzenegger never wavered in his support of local government and public safety agencies, which all would have been devastated if Prop 1A would have been defeated. We stayed together and we won.

The Governor now faces tremendous criticism, simply because he wants to bring some fiscal sanity to a pension system that will, if not fixed, not only jeopardize the fiscal health of this State but that of the retirees themselves. So I find it more than a bit ironic that the same members of the legislature that supported devastating police forces and fire departments around the state, along with some misguided union leaders, now want to label this governor as being

anti-police and anti-firefighter. Some of the same folks that would have lost their jobs if Governor Schwarzenegger had not stood his ground are protesting and jeering alongside those that tried to get them fired. I find it inexplicable. The truth is this campaign's worst enemy. I know him, I've been with him in the tent. I support Governor Schwarzenegger 100% on these issues. We respect each other, but I know that man's heart. I've seen him agonize over California's health. He is a member of 3 unions, I am a member of 4 unions. I know these are strong words. I don't want to run you out of here, but the most important thing that I have is honesty with you. If it costs me political capital to do so, then so be it.

Speaking of losing political capital, let's talk about education. As we stated earlier, everything that makes a successful city has its roots in education. Public safety, jobs, housing, economic prosperity and neighborhood health are all under the traditional mayoral jurisdiction and are all controlled primarily by education, in particular K-12 education. I was criticized for making education a priority for this administration, when in reality, if I had not, I would have betrayed my oath of office.

The fact of the matter is that education is the primary determinant of the health of every city in this state, in particular, Fresno, and therefore the State itself. And the fact is, the K-12 public school system takes well over 50% of a \$115 billion dollar budget. We spend more on K-12 education than the total General Funds of 20 states in the Union. Yet there is no system in place to track where much of that money goes or whether it is spent properly.

The fact is, what was once a school system that was the envy of the nation is now a special interest-controlled, politically-poisoned tragedy. It has kept children and parents trapped behind a wall of legislative power bought, paid for and driven by an insatiable thirst for total control at the expense of the hopes and dreams of our state's most needy children, many of whom reside inside the city limits of our community. This institutionalized dysfunction at the state level has crippled school districts at the local level.

When I took office, I stated that, if we did not take action immediately, that Fresno Unified would face a state takeover within five years. Well, I was wrong, it was within four. And believe me, I do not stand up here gloating. In that time, there are some shining stars. I want to commend Chuck McCulley and the present Board for doing the very best they can to serve the children of Fresno Unified under extraordinarily difficult conditions. They are not the problem. We have some of the best teachers, best students, best leaders in the country. The system is the problem.

If we do not take immediate action to reform K-12 public education in the State of California, it is going to implode within five years. Governor Schwarzenegger understands this. He understands that we need to hold public education accountable for providing a quality education to every child and the efficient and effective use of taxpayer dollars in that mission. That position that he's being criticized for is no more anti-teacher than saying that we need to hold the health care industry accountable is anti-doctor. The Governor's belief that the most challenged schools should have some of the most qualified teachers is no more anti-teacher than saying our most challenged neighborhoods need the most experienced police officers is anti-police.

The CTA leadership understands this and others, they know that, but the CTA knows it in a different vein. It's not that they think the Governor's reforms will fail, it's that they know with certainty that they will succeed. And when they do, those walls that they have built to keep our kids and parents away from quality education and choice will begin to crumble. They are ready to spend \$150 million dollars not only to keep those walls standing, but to make them higher, deeper and thicker than before.

The choice is clear. Become a team and support the Governor's education reforms and we have a chance to salvage this once great public school system and return it to national prominence. Or we can stand put and watch a well-financed and well-coordinated campaign of misinformation and distortion pound away at him, pound away at a man who is willing to lay his

political life on the line for our children. I guess you know how I feel in that situation.

I would like to recognize, though, some good things in this system:

Voluntary & Confidential Student Drug Testing Programs

- *Fowler Unified High School*
- *Kingsburg High School District*

Academic Improvements

- *McLane High School – Has met federal goals two years in a row and is now off the underperforming list of Program Improvement Schools.*
- *West Fresno School District – The district as a whole had an API gain of 51 points*

School Recognition Awards

- *McCardle Elementary (Fresno Unified)– Chosen as one of 35 California schools nominated as a Blue Ribbon School*
- *Steinbeck Elementary (Central Unified)– Title I Academic Achievement Award*
- *Steinbeck Elementary Teacher (Central Unified) Katrina Williams – Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Teaching program*
- *Kastner Intermediate (Clovis Unified) – California Distinguished School Award (Other Distinguished Schools include Alta Sierra Intermediate & Buchanan High School)*

Please stand and be recognized.

Yes, our team has learned how to win and we are determined to keep winning. But, in order to do that, we must stay true to our commitment to face our challenges, as daunting as they may seem, head-on.

We are part of an even bigger team – Team America. We're reminded on an almost daily basis that freedom is not free and often it requires the ultimate

sacrifice to preserve it. With us today are the families who have lost loved ones who made that sacrifice for the cause of freedom. Would Marc, Linda and Anna Unger, parents and sister of Specialist Daniel Unger; Noemi Rangel, wife of Staff Sgt. Jose Carlos Rangel; and Sandra McFarland, mother of Sgt. Lindsey James please stand? Your sacrifice will never be forgotten.

We also have with us today several members of the military who have come back home safely and for that we are so grateful. I send them off quite often and I say that I'm so proud and happy for them and pray for them. The only time that I am more grateful to them is when they come home safely. Will the members of the military who are with us today please stand? On behalf of all of Fresno, thank you for your courage and willingness to protect not only our freedom, but the freedom of those who cannot fight for themselves.

Team America is in the midst of a crisis. The cold, hard truth is that, if left unaddressed much longer, this crisis has the potential to devastate the State of California, in particular the City of Fresno. That issue that has become so politically volatile that many elected officials run like scalded dogs when confronted with it. I suppose I would too, if my political sense ever caught up with my love for my community.

The issue I am referring to is our border and the illegal immigration that is occurring at a record levels as I speak today. Now, I can see some squirming going on right now. Some will say the illegal immigration issue should not be included in a State of the City address. They will say the border is a federal issue, not a local issue. Well, the actual crossing of the border illegally may very well be a federal issue, but the consequences, all of them, that come after that are 100% local.

It is in our cities where our schools are trying to teach non-English speaking and limited English students, but their parents keep moving, fearful of the INS and deportation. They move so many times that, after so many moves, many of the children drop out and fall victim to drugs or, even worse, gangs.

That sounds about right. It is in our cities and towns that the jails are overflowing with people that we don't even know who they are or where they

came from. It's in our cities that the hospitals are packed 7 days a week with people using the emergency room as their primary doctor, putting those hospitals near bankruptcy because they have no other place to go. They're sick.

I realize that, if there is a sure way to lose political capital, I'm talking about it right now. But before the same old insults like "racist" and "bigot" start heading my way from the same old political groups, let me make one thing perfectly clear: I believe most of the people that cross the border are good, hardworking people just looking for a chance at a better life. Just like me, my mom and my dad did out in those fields. My heart is with them and I will have no part in demonizing them. We must have a guest worker program so they come to America with their dignity as well as their hopes and dreams. Walking with pride and confidence because they are legal, not worried about running from the authorities because they are not.

And for those that are tempted to vilify those coming here illegally to work, I would ask this: How in the world do you expect others to respect our borders when we don't? For decades, we have shaken our fists at the illegal immigrant with one hand while we wave them over the border with the other just because they will work cheap.

The truth will set us free, but first it will make us miserable. And the truth is that we have treated the border like the owner of a huge mansion that swings the doors of that mansion open, letting the smell of a delicious home-cooked meal waft outside where there is a huge neon sign that flashes: "Come on in. Everybody welcome – that is, if you'll work for cheap – no permission needed." Then some needy person reads the sign, walks in, starts eating, helps out around the house, and the owner accuses him of trespassing. The truth is, we have ourselves to blame for the chaos that is now masquerading as a border. It will be up to us to fix it.

The time for action is now. If those on the federal and state level won't act, then we at the local level must. I will soon be approaching the League of California Cities to ask them to make this issue a top priority. I will ask them to support a two-year moratorium on immigration in order to give us time to address

this issue thoroughly. I will also ask that a request be sent to President Bush, Governor Schwarzenegger and President Vicente Fox of Mexico to send representatives to a summit in Fresno to begin to construct an immigration policy that is effective, orderly, legal and fair. As good as these folks are, as much as we want them here, we have a nation of laws, an orderly society. It is more than a national defense issue. We are a nation of laws and respect for those laws is necessary to maintain those laws.

We believe we have a template for such a plan with our experiences with the recent Hmong resettlement process. We had people that we wanted here, people who wanted to come here. We sent a delegation to Thailand, found out who they were and we put together a task force addressing all of their problems. When those folks got to Fresno, they found housing, schools and job opportunities with open arms. That's how it should be – legal and organized. We have some of those refugees here today. Please stand. Welcome home.

All I want is to be able to honor every immigrant this way. I want them to hold their heads high. That's what this initiative is about. You've heard it. There will be sound bites lifted. Please help me tell the **whole** story.

A few nights ago at about 1:00 in the morning, I was sitting alone in my home office thinking about this speech. I was pondering how gratifying, yet how extremely difficult it is to become a winning team. Then another thought occurred to me – in our society, marked so strongly by socio-economic boundaries, how many good people, regardless of how much they give or how hard they work, never really feel like they are part of a team.

Then I took a drive out to Riverdale, as I always do before the State of the City. But, for some reason, I just couldn't shake that thought. So about a mile outside of town, I stopped on the side of the road next to an open field. I got out of the car and started walking through the field, thinking. I do that a lot when I need to figure some things out. You see, old country boys can't bring themselves to see Dr. Phil, so they just walk through dusty fields until they find answers or go crazy and I've probably done both at one time or another out there.

As I walked along, I saw a farm worker on a tractor. The tractor looked to be shiny and new with air conditioning – a far cry from the days my dad worked those very fields in the late sixties. Back then, eating dust all day was just an accepted part of the job. It was a part of breakfast.

About that time, a school bus going by on the road jogged my memory. I stopped for a moment, looked around and realized I was in the exact same field my dad and I worked together one day in 1967.

On that particular day, my dad's co-worker had fallen ill and he asked me – no – he **made** me go to work with him. He explained that the planting, for a reason I can't remember, had to be finished that day. The deal was that he would drive the tractor and my job was to walk a wooden plank behind the tractor, walking from planter bucket to planter bucket stirring the seed with my hand so the seeds wouldn't get clogged. Thrilling work, especially for a 15-year-old kid who was to be the starting pitcher in our Babe Ruth championship baseball game later that day.

Well, after the tractor broke down three times and got stuck twice, we were barely halfway done when I looked up through a thick cloud of dust to see the opponents' bus heading into Riverdale. I yelled to my dad that, if we didn't get moving soon, I was going to be late for the game. He yelled back his condolences, but the field – the entire field – was going to be planted that day.

An hour and a half later, he shut off the tractor and we walked together to his pickup truck, the entire field planted. I was sure the baseball game was over by then and I was giving him the silent treatment. About halfway home, he said, "Doc." (that's the nickname he had given me when I was five years old). "Doc, what did we do today?"

"We missed the biggest game of the year," I replied.

"Yeah we did," he said. "And I'm sorry about that. But what else did we do?"

"We stuck a bunch of seeds in the ground," I said with more than just a touch of sarcasm.

“Well,” he said, “I suppose you could look at it that way, but the way I see it, you and me just helped feed the world today and there’s a lot of hungry people in the world, you know.”

He never said another word about that subject and neither did I. I wish I could tell you that my attitude changed then and there, but it didn’t. All I could think about was getting to that game and maybe pitching the last inning. And I did. I pitched to one batter and he hit a line drive off the side of my head for a game-winning infield single.

No, I didn’t understand then what he was talking about, but I do now. You see, my dad didn’t just plant seeds in the ground that day, he planted them in my heart as well – the seeds of understanding. As I got older and those seeds started to grow, I began to understand more clearly what my father was trying to say to me that day. The closer understanding that everybody matters and everybody is needed. That sometimes, personal sacrifice is necessary when there’s a job that just has to be done. The understanding that, regardless of how much or how little your paycheck may be, the job doesn’t bring dignity to you, you bring dignity to the job. The understanding that a man and his 15 year-old, pouting son and the work they were doing in a small anonymous field outside of Riverdale in 1967 was somehow important, that we were part of the team.

In closing today, I would like to thank all those who get up and go to work everyday in Fresno. Folks who work hard, day in and day out, in jobs that don’t always get the acclaim and credit they deserve, but without them our City just couldn’t move forward.

To the folks like Lili at Willow Creek, who go to work in our nursing homes everyday, taking care of our parents and grandparents, you matter, Lili, and the team needs you.

To Jeff and all the dads who get home from a hard day’s work and manage to hustle out to a little league field to coach and mentor our young kids – boy, you matter and the team needs you.

To Yolanda, Stella C. and Immanuel, who were here working hard to prepare for this luncheon yesterday, with big smiles on their faces – you matter and the team needs you.

To the mechanic, the truck driver, the factory worker, the farm worker who keep this city, this state and this country moving – you matter and the team needs you.

And to the mothers that choose to stay at home and work in the most difficult, most important job in America, raising our children. Thank you for giving your best to teach our children right from wrong in a world that seems intent on teaching them that wrong is right. You matter and the team needs you.

To all the folks who work hard day in and day out in jobs that don't get acclaim and credit, but without whom our city just couldn't move along – I say thank you. You matter and the team needs you.

As far as political capital, there is a song on the radio that says you “never see a luggage rack on a hearse.” Some day, I will get to heaven. I will look St Peter in the eye and St. Peter will ask a lot of questions. “Autry, how much political capital do you have in your pocket?” I hope I can say, “None, St. Peter. Not one red cent. I left it all home in Fresno.”

Thank you. God Bless you, God Bless Fresno and God Bless America.